



CRATICUS DESTRUCTOR.

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Butcher Bird.

Vanga destructor, Temm. Man., Part I. p. lix.—Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 213.—Gould in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part I.

Barita destructor, Temm. Pl. Col. 273.

Wād-do-wād-ong, Aborigines of the lowland districts of Western Australia.

Butcher Bird, of the Colonists of Swan River.

THIS bird is a permanent resident in New South Wales and South Australia, where it inhabits the margins of the brushy lands near the coast, the sides of hills, and the belts of trees which occur in the more open parts of the country; in fact I scarcely know of any Australian bird so generally dispersed. Its presence is at all times betrayed by its extraordinary note, a jumble of discordant sounds impossible to be described. It is nearly always on the trees, where it sits motionless on some dead or exposed branch whence it can survey all around, and particularly the surface of the ground beneath, to which it makes perpendicular descents to secure any large insect or lizard that may attract its sharp and penetrating eye; it usually returns to the same branch to devour what it has captured, but at times will resort to other trees and impale its victim after the manner of the true Shrikes: mice, small birds, and large *Phasmicæ* come within the list of its ordinary diet. September and the three following months constitute the period of incubation. The nest, which is large and cup-shaped, is neatly formed of sticks, and in some instances beautifully lined with the shoots of the *Casuarina* and fibrous roots. Considerable difference is found to exist in the colour of the eggs, the ground colouring of some being dark yellowish brown, with obscure blotches and marks of a darker hue, and here and there a few black marks not unlike small blots of ink; while in others the ground colour is much lighter and the darker markings are more inclined to red, and to form a zone round the larger end; the eggs are generally three in number, one inch and three lines long by eleven lines broad.

Under ordinary circumstances this species is very shy and retiring, but at times is altogether as bold; as an evidence of which I may mention, that having caught a young *Eöpsaltria* and placed it in my pocket, the cries of the little captive attracted the attention of one of these birds, which continued to follow me through the woods for more than an hour, when the little tenant, disliking its close quarters, effected its escape and flitted away before me: I immediately gave chase; but the Butcher-bird, who had been following me, pounced down within two yards of my face and bore off the poor bird to a neighbouring tree, and although I ran to the rescue, it was of no avail, the prize being borne away from tree to tree until the tyrant paid the forfeit of his life by being shot for his temerity.

The sexes are so similar in appearance, that it is impossible to distinguish one from the other by any other means than dissection.

The male has the crown of the head, ear-coverts and back of the neck black; a white mark from the base of the bill to the eye; back and rump dark greyish brown; upper tail-coverts white; wings blackish brown; the middle secondaries white along their outer edges; tail black, all the feathers except the two middle ones tipped with white on their inner webs; under surface greyish white; bill bluish lead-colour at the base, passing into black at the tip; feet blackish lead-colour; irides very dark reddish brown.

The female resembles the male, but is more obscure in all her markings; and the young differ in being clothed in a plumage of mottled tawny and brown.

The figures represent the two sexes of the natural size.